

## PEDIATRIC ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SPECIALTY UNITS

### WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

- Each year, thousands of unplanned environmental toxins are released.
- More than 1,500 uncontrolled hazardous-waste sites are on the National Priorities List and are targeted for clean-up by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
- In the United States, one in four children lives within 4 miles of a hazardous waste site and is at greater risk of exposure to environmental contamination.

### WHAT HAS ATSDR ACCOMPLISHED?

In 1998, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) collaborated with the Association of Occupational and Environmental Clinics to develop the Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU) program. The PEHSUs are also supported by EPA. The program serves as a national resource for pediatricians, other healthcare providers, and communities. The program is designed to

- Reduce environmental health threats to children.
- Improve access to expertise in pediatric environmental medicine.
- Strengthen public health prevention capacity.

The key focus areas of the units are medical education and training, clinical consultation, and clinical specialty referrals for children who may have been exposed to hazardous substances in the environment. Healthcare providers specifically trained in both pediatrics and environmental medicines are available on a case-by-case basis to provide services to children and their families and to provide professionals with training and information on childhood environmental health issues. In several cities, the PEHSUs are affiliated with poison control centers, which are a resource for parents whose children have been exposed to toxic substances. During 2002, the PEHSU staff have clinically evaluated more than 1,550 children, conducted more than 29,700 telephone consultations, and provided education and training activities to more than 23,000 healthcare and public health professionals.

### WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Public use and demand for the PEHSU services has consistently increased since the program's inception. Eleven PEHSU clinics are operating in the United States; at least one is located in each of the Department of Health and Human Service's regions. ATSDR is working with healthcare and medical officials in Canada and Mexico to provide guidance on the development of PEHSU-type centers in those countries that also would be accessible to border communities in each country. In addition, ATSDR is exploring opportunities for the PEHSUs to collaborate with the Centers for Children's Environmental Health and Disease Prevention Research, a joint project of EPA, the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences, and CDC.